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ABSTRACT

Ways in which instructional design specifications for television production may be extended into a more precise domain, where forms of representation may be cataloged and culturally defined, are suggested in this study. Differences between film and television are discussed, and a distinction is made between format codes (i.e., culturally and historically articulated rules and sets of identifiable elements manifested in film and television program types) and presentational forms (i.e., the manner in which textual information is organized and represented. Burch's formalist film theory, which identifies presentational forms, is used as a framework for the creation of an inductive comparative analysis technique for examining the use of presentational forms in instructional television texts. This method also incorporates the television theory of John Ellis (1982) to provide a context for the production, distribution, and reception of these presentational forms in a cultural framework. Ellis' television theory is employed to examine Burch's methodology. An example illustrates the application of the inquiry technique to an instructional television program entitled "Supervisory Skills Assessment." Nineteen references are listed. (LMM)

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The Relationship of Film Theory to Instructional Television

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The Relationship of Film Theory to Instructional Television

INTRODUCTION:

Media vidistics scholar Martin Perlmutter (1981) has noted in an essay on the language of television:

> It is easy to suppose that television is electric film. It is also probably wrong, and certainly unscientific, to simply assume so and make no further inquiry (p. 417).

Whereas most informed media theorists and practitioners could scarcely argue with such a proclamation in light of current semiological discourse methodologies, instructional television production practices, partially based on instructional designs, may not acknowledging this distinction (Clark and Salomon, 1984).

As a media consultant at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I am constantly in contact with instructional design models that only recognize differences between film and television as resultant of how each media viscerally accommodate learner characteristics and task requirements (Romiszowski, 1981). These distinctions are of value when forging designs because they keep pedagogical considerations prominent. However, at the level of presentation, where all formats and forms are engendered by culture, and historically interpreted by spectators, the differences between these two media far exceed simple distinctions of learning capabilities and task analyses. Furthermore, the range of conditions far surpass screen size and resolution, or the ability to control a scan function button. These conditions include a cultural context for the production, distribution, and reception of film and television presentational forms (Ellis, 1982).

Since there is a disparity in the appropriation of terminology between the fields of educational media and communication arts and sciences, the terms format codes and presentational forms will be briefly outlined here. Format codes are culturally and historically articulated rules and sets of indentifiable elements that are manifested in film and television program types, such as news, sports, education, drama, variety, and advertising (Williams, 1974). Presentational form refers to the manner in which textual information is organized and represented. Presentational forms have specific "types" of articulations within the text. These articulations are evidenced in editing, camera angle, and any number of other presentational devices.

The main problem here is that differences in the format codes and presentational forms of film and television are recognized by media producers and spectators; yet, not by instructional designers (Reigeluth, 1983). John Ellis, in his book Visible Fictions (1982) argues that producers and spectators are not only aware of media differences, but that the production and viewing processes of television are acts of compliance:

> Broadcast TV can thus be seen as having a distinctive aesthetic, different from cinema. It offers relatively discrete and shot segments organised according to the patterns of repetition and innovation offered by the series and serial form, or merely into an agglomeration like a group of advertisements. These series forms are oriented towards the repetition of a basic dilemma rather than the resolution of an onward narrative movement. Often, the problematic that the series offers is that of vision itself: news and current affairs anchor themselves around the conception of the programme format as an eye roving across the world's events. The viewer tends to delegate his or her own look to the institution of TV. This delegation is made

> possible by the immediacy that the broadcast image claims for itself, despite the fact that almost all broadcasts are prerecorded. This immediacy, with its major form of direct address, and its dramas overwhelmingly concerned with notions of the domestic, can creat a sense of complicity between the TV viewer and institution. Both are in the home; the TV functions as a safe means of scanning the world outside (p. 170).

Through the production and reception of format codings, the relationship of the viewer to the institution of television perpetuates the legitimizing function of the medium as an ontologically correct, "meaning" producing agency. Based on the complicity of production and reception, presentational forms are utilized to perpetuate or reproduce this complicity and establish an aesthetic standard. According to Ellis, viewers and producers recognize media differences because they are aware of disparities in the appropriation of presentational forms, and the aesthetic standards associated with these forms, that represent their own relationship to the agency of production.

No matter how prescriptive the pedagogical coding of instructional television production processes, instructional designs generally do not acknowledge the complex presence of non-pedagogical codes, such as those borrowed from film, and how these codes might control and influence the "reading" of these texts. Whereas an instructional designer may only consider pedagogical codes on which to base presentational forms and their production specifications, instructional television producers are faced with a universe of codings infinitely more complex.

The aim of this inquiry is not to change current instructional design specifications for television production, but rather, to suggest how they may be extended into a more

precise domain where forms of presentation may be cataloged and culturally defined. Differences between film and television can be identified in the utilization of presentational forms and their historical and cultural modes of production, distribution, and reception. Furthermore, ignoring these differences can confound, if not negate, the entire design process by neglecting a possible locus of control.

BACKGROUND:

At last year's meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, Steve Lipkin (1984), in his presentation on how film and television interface, quite rightfully suggested that television analyses might be far better informed if someone were to cast an inquiry method in a mold similar to Noel Burch's Theory of Film Practice (1981), only applied to television. That is, a taxonomic examination of presentational forms and formats located in television programs. This suggestion is not completely novel in light of current formalist inquiries into television aesthetics, such as those forwarded by Herbert Zettl (1981). Moreover, methodologies for television analyses formulated in Great Britain by members of the Glasgow University group (eg. Stuart Hall), the Channel Four network, and media scholars such as John Fiske (1978), John Hartley (1978), Raymond Williams (1974), Albert Hunt (1981), Ann Kaplan (1983), and John Ellis (1982) have taken up this precise task of applying the more developed concepts of film theory to the analysis of instructional television.

In a recent issue of Screen (1984) magazine, television theorist, John Caughie, situates the historical development of television criticism and theory. He posits that Classic film

theories, such as those created by Eisenstein (1949), Arnheim (1957), and Kracauer (1960), generally suffer from ontological essentialism in their search for an object of discourse. In the seventies, film theorists such as Metz (1974) and Wollen (1972) evoked cultural and sociological methodologies to mobilize semiology beyond this formal essentialism. It is at this point in history, and in this tradition, that television theory was developed and socio-cultural methodologies were adopted. However, Caughie notes that as the result of the different developmental periods in which film and television theories were forged, a disparity emerged. Namely, an object of discourse:

> Where dissatisfaction comes, I suppose, is finally with television theory's failure to engage dialectically with the film theory of the seventies. Rather than confronting its past productively, a great deal of television theory and criticism seems to be trying to reject the unwanted parent at the same time as tying itself to its terminological apron strings. The result is a very generalized, and sometimes quite inappropriate sense of discourses of television. We still don't really understand the very basic and specific formal operations of television within its programme categories: the organisation of look, continuity editing, the differences between mixing and editing, the construction of space, camera movement, sound and image (p. 119).

In otherwords, by placing television in a socio-cultural framework of representation before examining the formal operations of the medium, television theory has provided little in the way of analyses of presentational forms or other objects of discourse. This paper proposes to partially rectify this problem by utilizing a hybrid media analysis technique based on Burch's formalist film theory and Ellis television theory.

METHODOLOGY:

This inquiry proposes to facilitate Burch's formalist film

theory to create an inductive comparative analysis technique by which to examine the utilization of presentational forms located in instructional television texts. Noting the current trend of media scholars applying film theory to the analyses of television, this inquiry will incorporate the television theory of John Ellis (1982) to contextualize the production, distribution, and reception of these presentational forms in a cultural framework. In otherwords, Burch's film theory, which identifies presentational forms, will be utilized as a tool for examining instructional television texts, while Ellis' television theory will be employed to examine Burch's methodology. This cross-referencing of film and television theory should create a checks-and-balances system for analyzing both the object of discourse and its cultural context. Finally, it will be suggested how the information generated by this inquiry technique might be facilitated in instructional designs.

INQUIRY METHOD:

Noel Burch, the founder of l' Institut de Formation Cinematographique, a French school of film theory and production, is generally considered by media scholars to be a formalist theorist because of his emphasis on presentational form and syntax in the production of the medium. Burch organizes his analysis technique to include six primary classifications: 1). dialectical parameters, 2). spatiotemporal articulations, 3). screen and off-screen space, 4). plastic interactions, 5). subject matter, and 6). perturbing factors. These six elements operate systematically and constitute the decoupage, or operational structure of presentational forms. Burch situates

filmic form as dynamic; systematically complex.

Burch argues that there are foundation structures to film. Furthermore, these structures are always posed in dialectical opposition to each other, and apply to every presentational form. These dialectical parameters include legibility and duration. There is a dialectical relationship between what presentational forms are perceptible or imperceptible and expanded or contracted. For example, the longer (duration) a presentational form appears on the screen, the easier it is to identify it (legibility).

Other dialectics include photographic parameters such as soft or sharp focus, black or white shading, and monochrome or color film stock.

Burch also identifies organic dialectics such as absence or presence of image, intraframe movement or static central subject, backward or forward motion around a stationary image, fast or slow motion around normal velocity, live or animated subject matter, exterior or interior decor, and location or studio setting.

Narrative time constitutes yet another subcategory of dialectical parameters and designates presentational forms as past or present tense, temporally framed as flashbacks or flashforwards, and thematic or plastic variations.

Dialectical parameters also include the structural uses of sound as demonstrated by the formal presence of sound or silence, synchronous or asynchronous sound, and live or dubbed sound.

According to Burch, when a film is a completed unit that has achieved decoupage, presentational forms are organized in

successions of temporal and spatial articulations. Temporal articulation refers to the organization of shot transitions. Spatial articulations refers to the manner in which the space represented by two shots in succession maintain or distort the continuity of the film. Burch emphasizes that all temporal articulations must be accompanied by spatial articulations of form. This is how the time/space relationship of film is represented. The convergence of spatial and temporal articulations generate patterns of mutual inference. Mutual inference refers to the set of of controlled spatial and temporal articulations that are formally presented at any given transition between shots. Burch proposes that there are five types of temporal articulations, which include the following: 1). absolute temporal continuity, 2). time abridgement, 3). indefinite time ellipsis, 4). short time reversal, and 5). indefinite time reversal. Each of these temporal articulations are accompanied by one of the three types of spatial articulations: 1). absolute spatial continuity, 2). absence of spatial continuity, and 3). proximate or radical discontinuity. By indexing temporal and spatial articulations, fifteen patterns of mutual inference can be identified.

The use of screen and off-screen space is another factor to be considered when identifying presentational forms in the filmic text. Space may be represented on the surface of the screen, but also, by what is not included in this presentational form. Off-screen space may be represented in film via directional vectors created by movements of the subject matter and apparatus. For example, off-screen space may be represented in a film when a

character walks out of the frame; thus indicating to the spectator that there is space beyond the proscenium of the screen. Off-screen space may be left, right, above, below, and behind area projected on the screen, as well as the space occupied by the camera.

Burch suggests that the editing of shots in sequence not only generates spatial and temporal articulations, but also plastic interactions between shots. That is, the surface or material of the film fragments also effect the presentation of forms. Plastic interactions do not account for cinematic or narrative time and space. Rather, plastic interactions account for the real time and space in which film fragments are joined together. Burch identifies two types of plastic interactions: static and dynamic. A static articulation is created when a match-cut between two shots portrays the linked filmic material as inactive. Conversely, when one or both shots utilize the movements of fragments of film in the plastic process of editing, the articulation is dynamic.

Burch argues that much of film theory is centered around analyses of the subject. However, ~~these~~ theorists generally appropriate the subject to be a term for theme or plot. Burch rejects this use of the term and appropriates it in two different manners. First, the subject of a film is the material form or essential substance of discourse. Secondly, Burch refers to the subject as a generic term that describes "what" the structure of the film is used to represent. Therefore, the subject is both the material form or configuration of film fragments, and the structure that these fragments represent.

Film subjects may either be fictional or non-fictional. Fictional subjects are those that employ traditional dramatic narratives based on literary conditions. These conditions are used to evoke experiences that are interpreted by the viewer as being caused by an invariable relationship between the filmic discourse and "reality." Non-fiction film is possible only through the utilization of cinematic conditions of the subject to represent an abstract "reality." These cinematic conditions are employed to evoke experiences that are interpreted by the viewer as being caused by the presentational structure of the filmic discourse.

Burch notes that the formal domain of film can be altered by the presence of disruptive or perturbing factors. One element out of the filmic phenomenon out of place can render the entire continuity of presentational forms chaotic. Two perturbing factors are singled out by Burch to examine their confounding role in the production process: chance and structures of aggression. Chance refers to those disruptive elements that jeopardize the filmmaker's ability to control or regulate his production practices. Structures of aggression are those presentational forms that violate the tacit agreement between the screen and spectator to perpetuate a hypnotic condition, by producing, through discontinuity, surprise and discomfort.

In total, Burch's film theory represents a systematic method of cataloging presentational forms located in filmic texts and delineating how the interrelationships of these forms constitute the aesthetically communicative operations of this structure. The categorization of specific presentational forms

enables the theory to inductively posit a generic conception of the medium, but not necessarily the only conception.

Utilizing this film theory to examine different media poses the problem of comparing dissimilar objects. Burch's film theory allows for a general media analysis technique by which to explore the objects of discourse, but it has no context in which to posit their relevance to television. In order to make Burch's film theory applicable to television, it must be situated in the context of television theory so that the modus operandi of Burch's own inquiry method may be scrutinized to determine if the production, distribution, and reception of presentational forms are operationally similar or dissimilar in both media.

John Ellis (1982) employs methodologies borrowed from film theory to address the relationship between the economic institutions that produce each medium, which he proposes influences the production of presentational forms. Ellis suggests that one such consequence of the economics of production is the historical mode of presentational form articulated in film as opposed to the live mode articulated in television. Ellis contends that the film spectator, via their cultural placement and consciousness of the mode in which films are produced and distributed, assumes that the diegetic events depicted in presentational forms have already occurred before the point of presentation. That is, the spectator assumes that the story has already occurred and that the medium is just neutrally recanting the tale. Television, on the other hand, never allows its narrative mode to come to a point of closure or resolution because of its utilization of serial presentational form, which

is, of course, a direct reflection of its economic production and distribution. Sports programs, soap operas, situation comedies and the evening news all perpetually return to the tv screen hour-after-hour, day-after-day, and week-after-week. As a result of seriatum presentational forms, television is perceived as being continuous; even when programs are taken out of the context of this flow and presented in a classroom situation (Williams, 1974). The viewing pattern of television is established by thousands of hours of home viewing; not one discrete classroom showing.

In addition, for Ellis, the relationship of the sound and image of television to narrative form is also resultant of the complex relationships between media producing institutions and viewers:

> Broadcast TV characteristically offers an image that is stripped down, with no unnecessary details. Cutting produces forms of variation of visual information, and sound has an important role in drawing the viewer's attention back to the screen. The image and sound both tend to create a sense of immediacy, which produces a kind of complicity between the viewer and the TV institution. This can provide a powerful form of consensus, since it tends to define the domestic place of the TV set as a kind of norm, against which the 'outside world' represented on TV can be measured. This regime of image and sound, together with the segment and series forms, has created a distinct form of narration in broadcast TV (p. 144).
>
> This broadcast TV form of narration proposes itself to a particular kind of viewer, a viewer relaxing at home. It makes certain assumption, more or less unwarrented, about this viewer, and proposes a particular kind of position of viewing for the viewer. This form of viewing attitude has the effect of sealing the consensus nature of broadcast TV (p. 159).

According to Ellis, all presentational forms in television are utilized by dominant institutions of production to direct,

through the use of narrative, the communicative or meaning-making relationship of the agency of the medium and the viewer; thus, maintaining perceptions that TV is a consensus form; a "democratic window" to the world. Therefore, presentational forms are generated to provide codings that perpetuate social and cultural relationships. In otherwords, Ellis' television theory is intertextual; it is used to examine the relationship of the text to its cultural and social context. On the otherhand, Burch's film theory is intratextual; it is used to examine the relationships of presentational forms that are operative within the text. Ellis, like cultural theorist Terry Lovell (1980), situates the text and its utilization of presentational forms as the product of complicity. In contrast, Burch situates the text in its use of presentational forms as the result of aesthetic and poetic contradictions implict in the organization of form.

In practice, Burch's categories would be used to analyze specific instructional television texts. The utilization of presentational forms located in the texts would then be documented and categorized. These forms would then be examined in light of their context, as figured by Ellis' television theory. This matrice of Burch and Ellis will hopefully allow for both intertextual and intratextual analyses.

TEST APPLICATION:

To test this inquiry technique, I chose an instructional television program entitled "Supervisory Skills Assessment." It was designed by Dr. Geraldine Markel (1983) and produced by Instructional Strategy Services at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor.

It should be noted here that in light of time restraints, this test inquiry will be at best terse. It is presented here merely to give you an idea of how this inquiry technique operates.

The program utilizes a wide array of presentational forms. They are summarized as follows: dialectical parameters display a definite tendency toward perceptibility, expansion, sharp focus, neither black or white shading, color, presence of image, static central subject, forward motion, live subject, interior decor, present tense, neither flashback or flashforward, thematic variations, and synchronous sound, both live and dubbed.

In addition, spatiotemporal articulations between shots generally employ absolute temporal continuity, with a few time abridgements, as well as absolute spatial continuity within scenes, and absence of spatial continuity between scenes.

On-screen space is most commonly utilized in this ITV program. Off-screen space is rarely represented.

Without exception, all plastic interactions between shots are static articulations.

The subject matter type is fictional since this particular ITV program utilizes presentational forms as representations of realty and not the medium itself.

Finally, there is little evidence of chance or structures of aggression in this program, save a few lens refractions and mid-day shadows.

Whereas it is impossible to infer from one test analysis that ITV utilizes presentational forms that are similar or dissimilar to those utilized by film, as posited by Burch, there

are some distinct patterns here that might be addressed by Ellis' contextual theory of television. For example, this program displays a definite tendency towards the zero point of style. That is, the utilization of codes that perpetuate historical and cultural continuity via the use of presentational forms. These forms maintain a perceived transparent relationship between the medium and reality. The program does not employ novel codes that might implicate its structural method of presentation. In otherwords, this ITV program sticks to modes of presentation historically perpetuated by film, and later, television. If programmatic inquiries indicated that utilization of these specific forms were historically perpetuated by instructional format codings, the resultant information would provide instructional designers with a means by which to maintain the status-quo of instruction or resist its trajectory via the manipulation of presentational forms.

Furthermore, and perhaps, more importantly, although there might appear to be a large overlap in the utilization of presentational forms by both film and television, Burch's formalist theory appropriates a descriptive method of inquiry that provides a description of "what" these forms are; not just a pedagogical prescription. This information allows the instructional developer to utilize each medium according to an entire range of presentational forms. A range, in its complexity, recognized by viewers.

CLOSING COMMENTS:

The cross-referencing of Burch's film theory and Ellis' television theory represents only one conception of a critical

inquiry technique for the analysis of instructional television. In an effort to expand the critical base of this inquiry technique, other formative film theories, such as those posited by Eisenstein (1949) and Arnheim (1957), would be cross-referenced with television theories, such as those advanced by Williams (1974) and Fiske and Hartley (1978), might provide additional information about the relationship between the two media.

Program formats, such as news and sports, would then be contrasted for similarities and dissimilarities. In short, by cross-referencing these theories, a taxonomic conception of what forms are present in what texts under what conditions can begin to be formulated. It must be stressed here, that this type of inquiry is only the first step in a series of inquiries. As John Caughie (1984) has pointed out, programmatic research on how film and television interface will become increasingly important as both media are incorporated in new hybrid program forms, such as Home Box Office TV, and hi-tech movies, since these hybrid programs may utilize even more complex presentational forms.

Burch's film theory was forged to raise the consciousness of filmmakers in regard to how control of the medium may be obtained through the utilization of specific presentational forms. Curiously enough, control and regulation are also salient concerns of instructional design models. There is no apparent reason that the taxonomic information generated by this inquiry method could not be directly incorporated into production specifications, partially influenced by design models, for instructional television. The utilization of pedagogical codes

may be aided or confounded by the utilization of television presentational forms. Therefore, it seems logical that these presentational forms be accounted for in order to more precisely regulate control of the medium, and thus, its ability to instruct.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

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